

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

2615 S. GRAND AVE., SUITE 100
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90007



United We Stand



Joseph N. Smith
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, August 8, 2012

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Bob Archuleta, Chair
Carvel Gay, Vice Chair
Dave Culmer
Stephanie Stone
Ramon Rodriguez

Commissioners

Fred Flores
Steve Rosmarin

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Tatiana Rosas, Executive Secretary

Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes

Chair Bob Archuleta called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m., and welcomed everyone for attending. He also thanked and acknowledged Congresswoman Grace Napolitano and her support of veterans. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Hector F. Elizalde, Veterans/Military Liaison for Congresswoman Gail Napolitano and due to a lack of a quorum, only five Commissioners present; the approval of minutes was postponed.

Roll Call

As noted above.

Chairman's Report

Chair Archuleta welcomed everyone for attending today's meeting. He thanked Mr. Elizalde for the continued support of the 38th Congressional District and for attending today's meeting.

Comments from Audience (three minutes each)

Fisher Foundation

Commissioner Ramon Rodriguez introduced Mr. Tim Byk, Founder and Executive Director, West Los Angeles Fisher Foundation. Mr. Byk stated that the Fisher Houses provide the families some of the comforts of home such as home cooked meals, a garden and a library. In addition, they can bond and empathize with other families experiencing the same emotions. Meanwhile, the Veteran also benefits by having the physical and emotional support of his/her family during treatment.

Mr. Byk stated that the West LA Fisher House Foundation, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization has raised just under \$3 Million and hopes to reach their fund raising goal of \$3.5 Million before the end of this year. He stated their success was due to community support from individuals, families and businesses. He acknowledged and said that

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special thanks to Former American Legion Post Commander Mr. Louis Cozolino and the members of Pacific Palisades Post 283 who made a generous contribution totaling \$2.15 Million.

Mr. Tim Byk pointed out that there is at least one Fisher House at every major military medical center to assist families in need and to ensure that they are provided with the comforts of home in a supportive environment. Annually, the Fisher House program serves more than 10,000 families, and have made available nearly 2.5 million days of lodging to family members since the program originated in 1990. By law, there is no charge for any family to stay at a Fisher House operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs; and Fisher House Foundation uses donations to reimburse the individual Fisher Houses operated by the Army, Navy, and Air Force. No family pays to stay at any Fisher House!

We are now raising money for the construction of a second Fisher House in nearby Long Beach. We need your support to make this dream a reality.

Mr. Byk stated to Save the Date on November 10th the Marine Corps Birthday, Fisher House will be hosting a free concert at the Wadsworth Theatre entitled, "A Day of Heroes."

Commissioner Rodriguez stated that he too is part of the Fisher House family. He and his family stayed at the Fisher House in San Antonio, Texas when his son was severely burned. They provided him with air fare, transportation and lodging. The Fisher House is a free place for Veterans' families to stay while their loved one is undergoing care at the VA facility. He is very grateful and salutes the Fisher House; it has his full support.

Portraits of the Fallen

Sherry Moore, Founder and Army veteran, Portraits of the Fallen Memorial, is to commemorate the sacrifices of those American military service members who have died while serving our country during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Her proposal is to have an inaugural exhibition of the first 150 portraits all of which are Southern California heroes be displayed at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall.

Ms. Moore stated that as of 2012, 150 portraits have been painted by local artists and the goal is to have all 716 (to date) of our Fallen California Heroes painted by May 2014. The ultimate goal is to have all 6500+ fallen US Heroes included in this Memorial. The portraits are digitized so they can be added to a digital application accessible on computers and mobile devices.

Commissioner Stone stated that because of a lack of quorum they are unable to vote or pass any motions. But for the record she wanted it noted that she would advocate for the Memorial. She also suggested that Ms. Moore contact the State of California so the Memorial can get more exposure.

American Legion

Jay Morales, retired Marine, Vietnam Veteran and Adjutant, American Legion, 17th District, Los Angeles Post No. 8, stated that Bob Hope Patriotic Hall was structured for patriotic purposes. They respectfully decline the housing of US VETS in the building. A one-stop shop, a social service program is not the intent of the building. It is to be used for honoring veterans. For these groups to occupy two entire floors of the building; this will generate revenue for the County and the original intent will be lost. He stated that everyone should look at past notes on restraining orders and the preservation of American ideals.

Commissioner Stone said there is a missing link somewhere in this process. There needs to be more communications between the County and the tenants. She would like the Commission to have a conversation between the Stakeholders, those veteran agencies that were housed at Patriotic Hall and those interested in space, and the County.

Chair Archuleta stated, "the building was dedicated, founded and rededicated to the veterans. We waited for it to be restored and returned back to the veterans. In today's age, the question is how to best serve veterans. Is it necessary to change the focus of the building a bit? That is the issue. Is the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial; shall we change that? Maybe Patriotic Hall is there for the purpose of honoring and memorializing our veterans. This discussion should be done in a public forum for all to participate."

Update on Military and Veterans Affairs Website

The following updates for the website are:

- Website project currently is in the content gathering stage. This stage has been longer than anticipated due to unexpected technical difficulty with the server and software that will host the website.
- Bob Hope Patriotic Hall (BHPH): Information has been provided and images of BHPH need to be submitted in digital format.
- Veterans Commission: Tatiana is working with Commissioner Stone on gathering biographical information from Commissioners.
- Veterans Services: Contact and layout is being worked on to provide a broad scope of information for clients
- The content training at ISD has been postponed until further notice.

VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center – Ralph Tillman

Mr. Ralph Tillman was unable to attend the meeting. Agenda item will be added to next month's meeting.

Veterans Home Support Committee – Steve Rosmarin

Commissioner Steve Rosmarin was unable to attend meeting. Agenda item will be added to next month's meeting. Commissioner stated that the Support Committee is turning into a Foundation Committee and their first meeting would be this Thursday.

Election of Commission Officers

Due to a lack of a quorum, only five Commissioners present, the election of Commission Officers is postponed until next month.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report – Colonel Joseph Smith

Chair Archuleta suggested foregoing the reading of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Department Report in lieu of Colonel Joseph N. Smith, Director's absence and accept the report as written.

New Business

The Department Report stated that there's been a significant increase in claims. The Commission inquired into how Los Angeles County compares to other Counties; they asked that Staff from MVA respond at next month's meeting.

Item's for Next Month's Agenda

- Election of Commission Officers
- Update on the Department Website
- Veterans Administration Greater Los Angeles Healthcare Center – Ralph Tillman
- Veterans Home Support Committee – Stephanie Stone and Steve Rosmarin
- Sunset law rules for the Commission to evaluate.
- Commissioner Ramon Rodriguez reiterated his July suggestion that a Commission meeting be held aboard the USS Iowa.
- Commissioner Carvel Gay will invite two Veterans for September's meeting to offer the Invocation and lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Good of the Order

Commissioner Stone; stated for the good of the order:

- Attended the Shakespeare Center of Los Angeles' Veterans in Arts Program at the Japanese Gardens on the grounds of the West Los Angeles VA. The Play was great and she highly recommends it.
- Attended the LA Collaborative meeting this morning.
- Looking at the USS Iowa Battleship anchored at the Port of Los Angeles for an event with the Mayor's Office.
- On 8/16 Goodwill hosting a Wounded Warrior event.
- On 8/30 Goodwill hosting a Gold Star event.

Commissioner Rodriguez stated; he did a walk through at the future Fisher House site on the VA Long Beach campus. He suggested inviting Rex Jennings and Alice Martinez to next month's meeting if schedule doesn't permit then to a future Commission meeting. He stated there are Military discounts at Knott's Berry Farm, when you show your Military I.D. card you save on Knott's Berry Farm Regular admission tickets & Knott's Soak City water parks. The offer does not apply to Junior or Senior tickets or to Special Ticketed Events, like the Halloween Haunt.

Commissioner Culmer stated; that Congress passed, and the President has signed into law, the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011. Included in this new law is the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP). VRAP offers up to 12 months of training assistance to unemployed Veterans. The VRAP offers 12 months of training assistance to Veterans who:

- Are at least 35 but no more than 60 years old
- Are unemployed on the date of application
- Received an other than dishonorable discharge
- Are not be eligible for any other VA education benefit program (e.g.: the Post-9/11 GI Bill, Montgomery GI Bill, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance)
- Are not in receipt of VA compensation due to unemployability
- Are not enrolled in a federal or state job training program

The program is limited to 45,000 participants from July 1, 2012, through September 30, 2012, and 54,000 participants from October 1, 2012, through March 31, 2014. Participants must attend full-time in order to receive up to 12 months of assistance equal to the monthly full-time payment rate under the Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty program (currently \$1,473 per month). The Department of Labor will offer employment assistance to every Veteran who participates upon completion of the program. Participants must be enrolled in a VA approved program of education offered by a community college or technical school. The program must lead to an Associate Degree, Non-College Degree, or a Certificate, and train the Veteran for a high demand occupation.

Vice Chair Gay stated; he was glad that to see those present and asked for news on Commissioner Steve Rosmarin.

Chair Archuleta stated; he wanted to salute the Department staff in the back scenes, the counselors, line staff, and Colonel Smith. Everyone works together to get the job done.

On a personal note, he represented his son Matthew at the funeral for Sgt. Nicholas C. Fredsti, 30, of San Diego, Calif., died June 15, in Spedar, Afghanistan, when insurgents attacked his unit with small arms fire. He was assigned to 1st Battalion, 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, Fort Bragg, N.C. General Army Lt. Gen. Michael T. Flynn became DIA director July 24, as well as commander of the collocated joint functional component command for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance that is part of U.S. Strategic Command. The general began his own career as a paratrooper with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N.C. He has served in command and staff positions, with multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, including as director of intelligence for U.S. Central Command and director of intelligence for the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

His second son Brandon is still at George Washington University in the Masters Program.

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Chair Archuleta adjourned meeting at 2:43 p.m.

Tatiana Rosas
Executive Secretary
August 8, 2012

Note: The next Commission meeting is scheduled to be held on Wednesday, September 12, 2012 at 1:30 p.m. in Suite 100 at the Department of Public Social Services site at 2615 S. Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA.